

Media Release

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Opera Australia's *Carmen* once again proves a smash hit on the harbour

Photo: Hamilton Lund

SEXY, sultry and with a voice that sweeps and soars across the harbour, it's little wonder that Carmen bewitches every man who comes across her path... this was a night where the embers of an old romance flared once more, passions were inflamed and they were seduced all over again by Bizet's gypsy enchantress. | Daily Telegraph

... recaptured the original production's most singular achievement: its meticulously realised dramatic balance between the opera's public and private moments. | The Australian

As Carmen, Josè Maria Lo Monaco has a full-bodied mezzo soprano voice, fiery in the top register and smouldering in lower. She sang the Habanera with staged sultriness and true line, throwing vocal darts that did not miss. | Sydney Morning Herald

Opera Australia's sizzling production of *Carmen* for the 2017 Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour season came to a close with a full house on Sunday night, finishing off a successful season with more than 50,000 attendees to the opera, now in its 6th year in its idyllic setting at Fleet Steps, near Mrs Macquarie's Chair in the Royal Botanic Gardens.

This year marks the first time that Opera Australia has remounted a production for the opera on the harbour and the results have confirmed that *Carmen* is still as popular as ever with audiences.

The production was not only an artistic success, attracting critical and public acclaim for its stirring performances, stunning voices and heart-starting Spanish-inspired dance, but also a triumph for the art-form's profile, attracting a wide audience with 35% of sales to audiences outside Sydney, including international, inter- and intra-state, many of whom attended their first opera.

The cast reflected the calibre of the production with stellar performances from the principal cast, including Italian soprano, Josè Maria Lo Monaco and Australian Sian Pendry, who both received critical acclaim for their powerful performances in the titular role, singing alongside Spanish tenor Andeka Gorrotxategi and Polish tenor Arnold Rutkowski as Don José.

The company consisted of 78 performers onstage, including 14 principals, 16 dancers, 40 chorus members, 8 actors plus 44 musicians in the Opera Australia Orchestra performing from beneath the stage as well as a creative and production team of more than 100 people, plus catering, ticketing and security personnel.

More than 50,000 attendees saw *Carmen*, the sixth production of Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour and drew international visitors from China, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa, Europe and the United States.

Opera Australia’s Artistic Director, Lyndon Terracini AM, championed Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour from its inception. He conceptualised and developed it as a means to amplify opera’s popularity and to share it with a wider audience. It has become a much-loved and highly anticipated event every autumn, becoming a highlight on Sydney’s cultural calendar and attracting visitors from all over Australia and internationally.

“I am thrilled that in our sixth year, Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour continues to bring outstanding performances from some of the world’s finest artists to this iconic location. The vibrant energy of this outstanding production continues to inspire audiences and to reaffirm the artistic and cultural value of this event. I’d like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the entire team for their efforts.

“Under the direction of revival director Andy Morton, the entire cast flourished and brought Bizet’s popular opera to life with passion and dedication. Kelley Abbey’s thrilling choreography gave the work a truly contemporary energy, and a sincere thanks to Brian Castles-Onion (who has conducted every production of Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour), who led the wonderful Opera Australia Orchestra, as well as the magnificent singers, dancers and actors from Australia and around the world.

“I’d also like to extend a sincere thanks to Dr Haruhisa Handa and the International Foundation for Arts and Culture whose ongoing support promotes opera to a diverse international and local audience.

“It is a joy to stage these magnificent operas in such a unique setting against the breathtaking backdrop of the Sydney Opera House: it truly is an experience like no other,” said Mr Terracini.

NSW Minister for Tourism and Major Events Adam Marshall said the NSW Government was proud to support the 2017 Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour through its tourism and major events agency, Destination NSW.

“Our government is committed to continuing to develop our top-class events calendar and it’s productions like *Carmen* that help us maintain our position as the number one events state in Australia,” Mr Marshall said.

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